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Paolo Totaro

Poems

Fence Sitters Fence Sitters

I love fence sitters [who are] true to peace
[as to] war [equidistant from] law [as to] crime.
Dexterity [is] gauche. Sinisterness [may be] right.
Cast[ing] a shadow over the truth
of a [midnight] moon in sunlight.

[But] fence sitters [require more
than love] require the dark wild forces
that make the skies rotate from right to left
and [when not observed] from left to right,
upside down, until all [views] are a-blend[ed]
[with what were] swishes and zigzags
[be]yond with[in] the fence sitters' minds.

I love them in [the] a world now coming
where [all ideas are a-blend[ed]
Good [cute] bad [acute] obtuse [moral]
ambiguisd supremized lethalfellated
mighty sitters [right and] left brain
anastomized [now] scream
cream [with me]: Hurray yarruH!

I hate fence sitters [who are] untrue to peace
[as to] war [as distant from] law [as to] crime.
Dexterity [is not] gauche. Sinisterness [won't be] right.
Cast[ing] no shadow over the lie
of a [midnight] sun in moonlight.

[When] fence sitters [want less hate]
they reject the luminous forces
that stop the skies rotate from left to right
and [when observed] from left to theft,
head upturned, until all [views] are suspended
[with what will be] christmas wishes
[be]yond with[out] the fence sitters' minds.

I hate them in [the] a world now gone
where [all ideas are separated
Good [cute] bad [acute] obtuse [moral]
ambiguisd supremized lethalfellated
mighty sitters [right and] left brain
anastomized [now] scream
cream [with me]: Hurray yarruH!
... the melancholy souls of those
Who lived without either infamy or praise
(Dante/Longfellow III).

Sydney, June 2016

Naples, June 1944

Yes, we started not with Snow White but with Boris Karlóff.

We would rather take fright at one monster than scoff at seven dwarfs.

Soppy scenes with heart-shaped apple pies, birds, dewy-eyed foal
were no match for the giant man-made Man trudging to the Pole.

We were allowed to go to the nearby cinema, me and my then soul-mate.
She and I were all of eleven, intrepid explorers, but home by eight.

It was the end of bombings. But then Vesuvius erupted. The counterfeit.

countervailed life's ongoing horror. Frankenstein made us used to it.

... l'anime triste di coloro

che visser senza 'nfamia e senza lodo (Inferno, III).

Paolo Totaro was born in Naples in 1933 and migrated to Sydney in 1963, where he joined the Australian Council as the first Director of Community Arts. Among several other public positions, he was appointed Founding Chairman of the New South Wales Ethnic Affairs Commission, Visiting Professor of the University of Western Sydney and Pro-Chancellor at the University of Technology (UTS, Sydney). He has written poetry most of his life. *Conversazioni Mute* was published in the anthology *Two Hundred Years of Australian Poetry* (OUP 1991), followed by *Collected Poems 1950-2011* (Padana Press 2012).

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